Some Practical Hints on Wood Engraving

J. Linton

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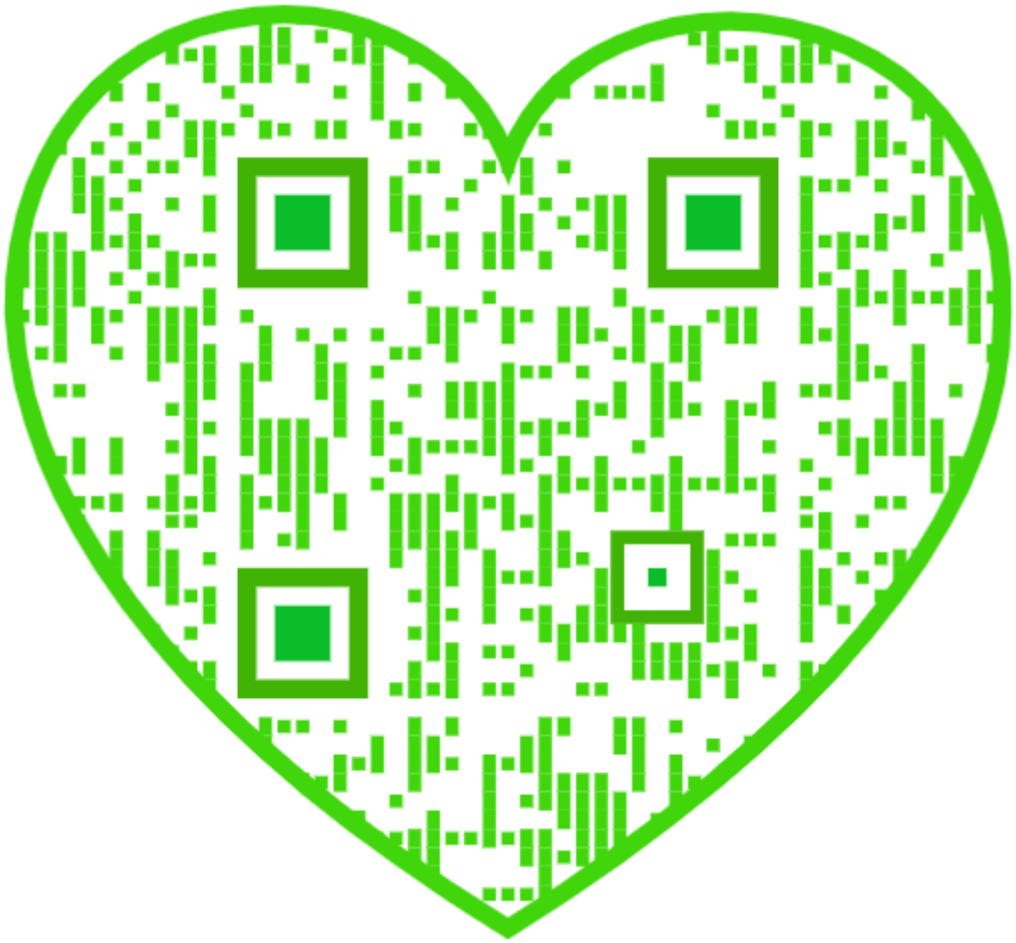


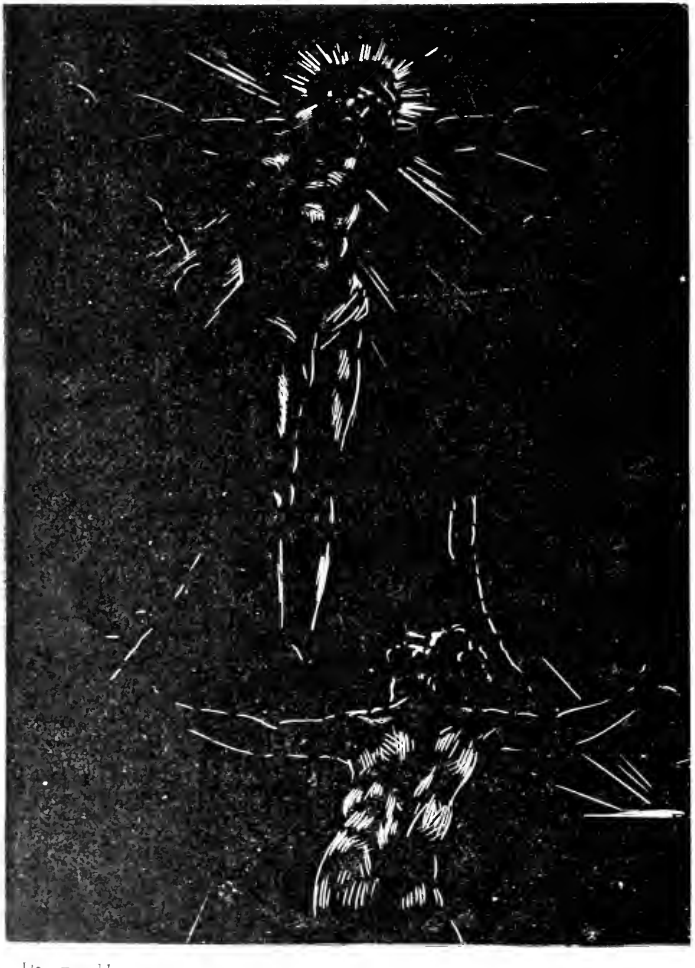


PLATE II

SOME PRACTICAL HINTS

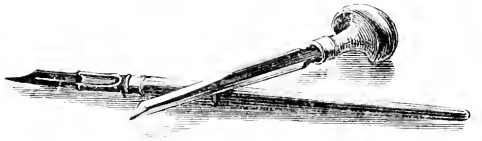
ON

WOOD-ENGRAVING

FOR THE INSTRUCTION OF REVIEWERS
AND THE PUBLIC

BY

W. J. LINTON



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TO THE AUTHOR

OF

AN EXPOSITION OF THE FALSE MEDIUM

I DEDICATE THESE HINTS, IN TOKEN

OF ADMIRATION AS WELL AS

PERSONAL REGARD.

ADVERTISEMENT

THE object of the following treatise is to help the general public (that is, those who had not the good fortune to read the *Atlantic Monthly* for June) toward some accuracy of judgment as to what is good and what bad in Engraving-on-Wood. What is said may also have an interest and be of advantage to engravers. The remarks interspersed for the special benefit of Reviewers whose ignorance evaded the *Atlantic* teaching will not perhaps acquire for me their spontaneous thanks. I have been compelled however to take the risk, said Reviewers' blunders serving me as texts, themselves as convenient blackboards whereupon my Hints might be made more sufficiently conspicuous. Why else should I have troubled them?

For the loan of Plate I, I am indebted, through the kindness of Mr. E. J. Whitney, to the American Tract Society; and for Plate IV my thanks are due to Messrs. Putnam.

NEW HAVEN, CONN.,
August, 1879.

W. J. LINTON.

CONTENTS

My Reviewers 3

Noble Simplicity 14

Fac-simile 27

White-Line 42

Mechanism and Art 54

Photography on Wood 70

Further Hints 82

SOME PRACTICAL HINTS

ON

WOOD-ENGRAVING

HINTS ON WOOD-ENGRAVING.

MY REVIEWERS

FOR the last June number of the *Atlantic Monthly* I wrote an article on Art in Engraving on Wood. Aware how little technically was known concerning engraving, I tried to make my meaning plain "to the meanest capacity." I confess I did not think of the Reviewers.

The article attracted much notice: a fact which I may state without any straining of my modesty, since the remarks of the Reviewers generally were the very reverse of complimentary. Wherefore it has become necessary, by way of preface to the present work, that I should endeavor at some reply. Not — though as sensitive as most men to the opinion of my fellows — not that I am very sore from the flaying I am supposed to have un-

dergone; the many stripes, like those of the wicked step-mother in the fairy tale, fell upon me soft as feathers (the foolish words of a few angry young men have no more weight), — but only to establish some qualification for my daring to write again.

It would seem that, my literary style not being sufficiently "lucid," my Reviewers generally missed my meaning; indeed they so comically contrariwise construed my words, furthering their misunderstanding by misquotation, that it is due not only to myself, but also to a book-buying, bewildered public, that I should rescue my character from these critics before attempting to explain my *Atlantic* explanations. The impatient reader may have heard what becomes of those who allow themselves to be led ditchward by the blind.

According to my Reviewers I am one of "the old fogies of Christendom" (a very ancient and respectable guild, for admission to which I am indebted to the kind and potent influence of Dr. Holland); a feeble and monotonous pugilist, at the end of my development; a worn-out, mechanical wood-engraver, whose blocks are disesteemed and declined by the publishers; "discontented," "disappointed," and "self-interested;" "petulant," "splenetic," "angry," "spiteful," "bigoted," "exaggerated," "exasperated," "vituperative;" eager only to pick holes, "like an artistic pickpocket," in the works

of better men — especially rising young men of whom I am envious. I bring, according to these gentlemen, neither honesty, nor intelligence, nor good-humor, nor liberal regard for Art to the platform from which I have the impudence to preach. In short, there is nothing except fifty years' experience to justify, or rather to excuse, the opening of my malicious lips or the scratching of my envenomed pen. Perhaps the allowance of that small advantage, of which even critical acumen cannot deprive me, the one seed-corn remaining out of my Reviewers' chaff-sack, may be accepted by a kindly public as some warrant for my presumption in offering *some practical hints* on wood engraving.

Why all this hubbub of their unfriendly voices? What have I done? I am guiltless of intentional offence. I did but to the best of my ability, and conscientiously, honestly and fairly criticize a style of work which, so far as my untaught judgment could or can perceive, is meretricious and mischievous. I named, but with "bated breath," one engraver only, not singled out by myself; and him I dealt with generously, sugaring with not stinted praise the censures I was bound to administer, even for his own medicining. I avoided other name-mentioning, confining my rebukes to the work, sparing the insignificant workmen. Is it treason to object to the use of a multiple machine in what ought to be a work of intelligent

art? Is it scandalous — *scandalum magnatum* — to name somebody's magazine, when it so loudly trumpets its ownership of the New Style? Is criticism of contemporary wood-engraving the unforgiven sin? What means this noise then in our ears? Is it only because my simple voice has disturbed that little brood of unfledged roosters that nestles under the motherly wings at 743 Broadway? For it is thence comes all the cackling. Dear little gentlemen! I am indeed not the fearful hobgoblin you in your skurrying have imaged. I have not the heart even to wish harm to one of you.

For myself, if I must speak autobiographically, partly for the sake of my Reviewers, whose generosity will certainly rejoice at my vindication, but chiefly in deference to a much-deluded Public, — since the adverse cackling is not openly announced as from Little Roosterdom, but comes out with the indorsement of respected and experienced editors (of the *Sun*, the *Nation*, &c.) as the quite coincident cackle of accepted wisdom, — for myself, then, speaking humbly, I protest that I am somewhat less offensive, and more trustworthy withal, than Little Roosterdom through the respective journals reports. It is more than fifty years since I began to handle a graver and to learn concerning wood-engraving. I cannot charge myself with having during that length of time ever written or spoken or thought enviously or uncharitably of a brother

artist. Jealousy I do not recognize as an artist's feeling; and I have faithfully and unfalteringly endeavored to make myself and my conduct worthy of an artist's name, however low might be my rank in Art. Among men older than myself, who had won repute while I was yet unknown, I counted many friends: John Thompson, William Harvey, Orrin Smith (whose partner I afterwards became), and others. I had some opportunities among these men of learning what good work is, even if my master, G. W. Bonner, — a nephew and pupil of Branston, and a good artist, — had not taught me. By my contemporaries, in some sense of course my rivals, I was well and friendlily esteemed: I do not recollect that I ever had an enemy or a dispute. And younger men in England, and not a few here, will speak of me as never withholding help, whether of advice or praise, and as incapable of grieving at the advancement of my juniors. What I have been able to do will not be lessened by the greater achievements of others. Methinks it is not only unconscious assurance which encourages me in saying that I have the right to speak, and at least as authoritatively as an art-critic, of Art in Engraving on Wood; and to escape (as I shall with thoughtful and gentlemanly opponents), even personal abuse, counter argument failing, when I speak with severity of what, in giving judgment, I am bound to condemn.

Enough of myself. To pass now to a few of the curious utterances which my *Atlantic* article provoked. One has to clear away rubbish before building; and after consideration of some queer criticisms, there may be room for observations which an intelligent reader, if not a Reviewer, may be able to comprehend.

First in order, preluding *Scribner*, comes that unusual authority in art matters, the *Times*, whose young man's remarkable remarks on "realism" and "impressionism," high art and photography on wood (not signed D. K.), I reserve for notice in another place. In the wake of the *Times* follows *Scribner* for July. I take off my shoes before I ascend those awful stairs to crawl beneath the bust of Pallas, overhanging the editorial portal. *Scribner* of course was bound to go for me. Is it D. K. again? Surely not Dr. Holland himself? He, a good man, the Washington of engraving independence, who may throw his little hatchet, but cannot lie, — he could not, even as matter of private opinion, have written, nor have allowed to stand had he read, that "we believe it is pretty well understood among publishers that Mr. Linton's work is not what it used to be." You did not believe that, Dr. Holland! knowing that four times — I think I may say five times — during the last few months Mr. Linton was asked to work for *Scribner*, and did deliver work so late as within a month of the above-quoted

belief. But who knows? Work was pressed upon the "old man at the end of his development," solely because of past respect and pity for his decline. And judging from other of the productions appearing in the magazine, — allowance cheerfully made for much *of excellent quality*, — I may not be the only recipient of the *Scribner* alms.

Scribner had, of course, to review me; but did not attempt to meet my arguments. In accordance with an old disreputable law maxim, "When you have no argument, abuse your adversary!" personalities such as I have sampled usurped the place of defence, even to the unhandsome dragging in of the names of persons who had nothing whatever to do with the questions at issue; and besides the personalities there was the reiterated disingenuousness of misquoting. Some half a dozen times the word *legitimate* is given as mine — a word I have never used. To borrow the Reviewer's words, "it certainly has not a very pretty look." That phrase does strike one as Hollandish, after all. Perhaps he reviewed the writing. It is only the *Times* article improved. One notice by-and-by may serve for both.

But if *Scribner* shirks the question, hiding behind its deeds of charity, the *Sun* still shines for all, and thence we may expect enlightenment. Nearly three columns of the *Sunday Sun*, more than an ordinary octavo pamphlet,

and all for three cents, inform one hundred and twenty thousand readers "concerning wood-engraving." The paper has been sold; the editor and the one hundred and twenty thousand readers sold also. Some little worthless information, so much as might be picked up from an engraver's errand-boy — not always correctly reported — is given at the outset. Such as: —

Wood-engraving is the converse of steel. In inking the steel plate, "the furrows and depressions receive the ink, the surface remains clean." [Which would rather astonish a steel-plate printer.]

Wood-engraving is done on box-wood, and the work is not healthful. [Probably on account of the fumes arising from the decomposed wood.]

Engravers as a class are among the most industrious of workers.

And designers ditto. An industrious and clever one, who is also a writer, "can turn out one article a month with ease, thereby making five thousand dollars a year;" but (carefully salting the provision in same paragraph), "as a matter of fact turns out only one in a year." And so does not make five thousand dollars a year.

"To prepare a block for a picture" [very clear that!] "it is whitened lightly, — some artists preferring for the purpose the surface of white enamelled cards." [And he might have added, for further elucidation of the mysteries,

that they sometimes turn up their coat-sleeves to prevent whitening the cuffs.]

Also "some artists draw with a mixture of black and white—*guache*;" "but the effects they secure are not very brilliant."

Others mix colors with their Indian ink.

"It must be understood that the drawing on the block has to be reversed—that is, drawn inversely as it appears when printed." [So. The style is worthy of the information.]

And so on through more than half the article; after which the teacher quits the mere explanatory and preparatory platform, and comes down to personal remarks and "criticism." Samples of both may suffice.

"Mr. Linton's great trouble now is that he *cannot any longer* exploit his own peculiar, and often ignorant, notions at the expense of the artists, *because photography-on-wood has interfered with him*, and because when—as we have heard it expressed—he 'cuts the whole soul out of a drawing,' it is compared with the original, the fact noted, and the block declined." Photography-on-wood is not the new invention my Reviewer seems to suppose. It has been "interfering" with me for twenty years, during which period, and for twenty years before, I have never had a block declined. When this unveracious satellite of the *Sun* asserted the contrary, he was probably "misinformed."

We call a man unveracious when he states the opposite of truth. I hope that is not "vituperation." What fitter word may I courteously employ toward the writer of the following? —

"Mr. Jungling engraves the white paint that Mr. Kelly uses. . . . Mr. Linton gets extremely angry with him and implies that he uses a 'multiple graver.' This remarkable tool is probably the offspring of Mr. Linton's imagination, because *we cannot find that any engraver of repute in New York ever saw one.*"

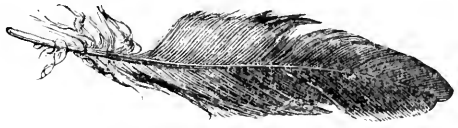
Mr. Linton never either named or referred to Mr. Jungling. The only cut drawn by Mr. Kelly which Mr. Linton criticized (a second being barely mentioned) has Mr. Evans' name to it. Doubtless the multiple graver — which this inquiring Reviewer dared not defend, and which, therefore, *he could not find* "that any engraver of repute in New York ever saw" — was, at the time Mr. Linton wrote, in use by the Reviewer's friend, Mr. Jungling. Unveracity does not fit the occasion here. Am I "spiteful"? I know, but refrain from giving, this Reviewer's name. He has friends who would be ashamed of him.

Of Mr. Jungling he writes that he engraves Mr. Kelly's "white paint," and really "conveys its quality." But "the effects are not brilliant."

Concerning photography, the remarks of this teacher

of "one hundred and twenty thousand readers" are of equal value. That subject will be treated further on. Here it may be enough to observe that he has evidently been misled by the errand-boy. The errand-boy must have known better.

Am I counting — rather discounting — all the *Sun* spots? Mercy, no! It were a labor of Hercules. They lie so thick that the sunlight on this occasion is but "darkness made visible." It is a veritable eclipse of that brilliant luminary, an eclipse not foretold in the almanac. But lo! before my mental vision stalks a profane person turning up his nose at the SUN. "Who looks there for Art?" Most irreverent! shall we try the *Nation*? *Nil-admirari* is not always blind; may possibly have discovered the hidden secrets of engraving on wood. Let us see. But the *Nation* requires a chapter to itself.



"NOBLE SIMPLICITY"

"THERE are two old styles of wood-engraving beloved of purists and critical students of this art, and each of them is noble and good: the plain black-outline work, best known to moderns in Dürer's and in Holbein's designs; and the white-line work known as Bewick's, in which the untouched surface of part of the block gives strong blacks, into which the white is carried by touches of the graver, every one of which tells. We might add to these the so-called 'chiaroscuro' prints of the Italians and others; but their large scale and use of tints, of color and of shade, put them to one side. The black-outline style and the black-mass-and-white-line style are both excellent, and those who love them may be forgiven for feeling a certain repulsion from modern work; but it is clear that modern work cannot follow both these styles at once. No person can conceive a combination of the two. We agree with Mr. Linton's

definition of the first as a mere mechanical cutting out of an outline-drawing made by a master, and of the second as the earliest and greatest development of fine art in wood-engraving — provided, always, that we except the chiaroscuro prints. And we think there is a tendency visible through the exaggerations and mistakes, and even the affectations, of the new and peculiar style of engraving which is now being developed by *Scribner's Monthly* and *Harper's Monthly*, to work back towards the conception and handling of the Bewick school. Its noble simplicity it may not be for the nineteenth century to attain, but its directness of method we may reach; and if we do, it will be through such work as Mr. Linton either assails with violence or passes with contemptuous silence."

This is the *Nation's* summing up of a labored and much-considered article, headed "Fine Arts — Wood-Engraving," reviewing the controversy between the *Atlantic* and *Scribner*. Fine words! over which nevertheless the Reviewer stumbles and breaks his shins. For "fine words butter no parsnips." Let us examine the whole judicial utterance!

"There are two old styles of wood-engraving beloved of purists and critical students of this art, and each of them is noble and good: *the plain black-outline work*, best known to moderns in Dürer's and in Holbein's de-

signs;" and then, "We agree with Mr. Linton's definition of the first as a mere mechanical cutting-out of *an outline-drawing*."

Now one would suppose that "purists and critical students of this art" would at least have some clear idea of what it is that is "beloved of" them. Also the Reviewer of Mr. Linton's writing should have read, not only with his elbows, what Mr. Linton's definition was of the engraving of Dürer's and Holbein's designs. Surely Mr. Linton never defined it as the (mechanical or other) "cutting out of an outline-drawing;" simply because, as every engraver knows, and every print-collector also knows, neither Dürer's nor Holbein's designs can be so defined. Dürer did draw in outline — his *Apocalypse*, for instance; Holbein has some outline designs in Erasmus' *Praise of Folly*, and a few others of little importance elsewhere: but neither can have his work characterized as outline-work. None of Dürer's most important drawings-on-wood are in outline: the *Greater Passion*, the *Little Passion*, the *Life of the Virgin*, the *Arch of Maximilian*, like everything else I can call to mind of any importance, are all shaded, sometimes even rich in color, light and shadow. I repeat, I can at this moment recollect nothing in outline except the *Apocalypse*. Nor is Holbein's method different, save in the slight exceptions I have noted. His one great work on wood, the *Dance*

of Death, is certainly not in outline, nor, by any amount of courteous equivocation, to be allowed to be so defined. When a Reviewer comes out so grandiloquently with his purists and critical students, he should know what he is talking about. Of course he has never seen the original Dürers or the original Holbeins; I know they are scarce: yet he need not take all upon hearsay. Is it possible he has never fallen across any of the many copies extant? In J. W. Bouton's bookstore (address in New York *Directory*), or, handier perhaps, at the New York Lithographic, Engraving, and Printing Co.'s (used to be at 16 and 18 Park Place — may have removed but will also be found in the *Directory*), the *Little Passion* may be seen, reproduced in fac-simile, so that the critical student cannot be deceived; and he will see that so much at least of Dürer's work is not to be defined as *outline*. It may be worth his seeing before his next Fine-Art article.

But though the charitable re-reviewer may opine that the critical student has never seen a Dürer or a Holbein, said student's further remarks may yet be instinct with artistic wisdom. Give him the benefit of the doubt till you have read the following!

Of the two styles beloved of him, he says, one is the black-outline (let him off the outline) work of Dürer and Holbein; the other the white-line work known as Bewick's, "*in which the untouched surface of part of the*

block gives strong blacks," whereby he distinguishes that from the Dürer black-not-outline style. But the untouched surface of the block gives blacks in the Dürer work also; does so likewise in the veriest outline work: it is the peculiarity of wood-engraving and all work which has to be printed from the surface. And the *strong blacks* he notices as so distinctive of the Bewick blocks are not in any sense stronger than the blacks in the Dürer blocks. Indeed, black is just black everywhere; and one black differs not from another in blackness. It is only the *quantity* of black, or its relative position, that can justify you in saying *this* is blacker than *that*. Wherefore I am forced to admit that I know nothing in Bewick's work more black — with a greater proportionate quantity or power of blackness in it — than the blackness to be found in some of the before-mentioned *Little Passion* blocks and other of Dürer's "outlines."

I am closely following the argument of my learned friend. Into these strong blacks of Bewick's, he tells us, "*the white is carried by touches of the graver, every one of which tells.*" This almost looks like technical acquaintance. Yet really it does not matter what the block is, or whose, Bewick's or anybody's; every touch of the graver in a piece of wood produces white, and cannot do otherwise. The Reviewer is merely saying, in his peculiar way, in words that are not very clear, not being

clear himself, that the untouched part of the Bewick block (as of any other) would print solid black, and when the graver cuts out a piece of the solid, *there* is so much white. If you cut a piece out of a potato, there will be a piece out. We need not a Fine-Art Reviewer imported expressly by the *Nation* to tell us that.

He proceeds:—"The black-outline style and the black-mass-and-white-line style are both excellent, and those who love them (purists and critical art-students) may be forgiven for feeling a certain repulsion from modern work; but it is clear that modern work cannot follow both these styles at once. *No person can conceive a combination of the two.*" Gently! gently! A combination of what two? Black lines left on the block and white lines cut in the block? My good sir! are you prepared to say that you ever took note of a block in which there was not that combination? I do not tell you that the two styles cannot be kept distinct; I only doubt your perception of the difference. Did you ever see a number of Harper's *Weekly Journal of Civilization?* In any number of that, or of *Harper's Monthly*, or of our favorite *Scribner*, you may find your inconceivable combination. I do not mean (to be plain with you) that you will find anything equal to a Holbein "outline," which was cut altogether in fac-simile [the also fac-simile Jefferson, p. 332 in *Scribner* for July.

is not quite up to that]; or anything even of the *guache* series so good as Bewick's white-line, which, as you correctly inform us, was done by touches of the graver [so was the Jefferson]; but you will find black-line of the Holbein fashion — if not to be beloved like the Holbeins, and white-line as in Bewick — if not of his artistic excellence, in almost every cut on which your "certain repulsion" may allow you to set a purist's eyes.

Yet another comment as you continue. Each of these styles of wood-engraving (you tell us), "that best known to moderns in Dürer's and in Holbein's designs —" [Pardon me a moment! Moderns who know anything about this early style know it just as well from the *Nuremberg Chronicle*, or from the works of the "Little Masters," as from any other plank-cuts. Go on again!] "Each of these styles" — that known in Dürer's and Holbein's designs, and that known in Bewick's — "is *noble* and good." How is that — when "we agree with Mr. Linton's definition of the first as a mere mechanical cutting-out"? Very *good* mere mechanical cutting out may be; but what of *nobleness* is there in unskilled carpenter's work, the merest mechanism, which requires but hand-labor, patience, and exactness, and has never need or even room for art, or taste, or judgment? Surely *noble* in this connection is a misapplied term! Each noble and good? And no

difference between the "mere mechanical cutting out" and the "greatest development of fine art"? Yes! one: the greatest development is further characterized as of "*noble simplicity*." Simplicity should rather belong to the ruder and primitive method. One would think that it were simpler to outline with a jack-knife, and to gouge out the spaces between four straight lines, or even four curved lines, than to draw expressively with a graver — which drawing alone entitled Bewick to the rank of Artist. "Noble simplicity" perhaps means something else; but will not in any sense apply to Bewick. His mechanism was not so much simple as rude; and his work is noble only as artist-work, in spite of *mechanical disability* — which is not *simplicity*.

Let the Reviewer finish! Here is his peroration, his conclusion of the whole matter: — "We think there is a tendency, visible through the *exaggerations* and *mistakes*, and even the *affectations* of the new and *peculiar* style of engraving which is now being developed in *Scribner's Monthly* and in *Harper's Monthly*, to work back towards the conception and handling of the Bewick school. Its noble simplicity it may not be for the nineteenth century to attain" [a sad look-out for the masters of the peculiar style]; "but its directness of method we may reach; and if we do, it will be through such work as Mr. Linton either assails with violence or passes with contemptuous silence."

Which means (if it be worth while to seek the meaning of a teacher whose incompetence is so manifest, a critic who defines Dürer's work as outline, and who in his noble simplicity — I dare wager — cannot tell a Bewick from a Clennell) that the artistic and most unmechanical handling of Bewick is to be "worked back to" — meaning perhaps recovered — by a purely mechanical and utterly unartistic method, the tendency to such recovery being shown in the exaggerations and mistakes and affectations of its mechanical peculiarities, in such engravings as Mr. Cole's undeveloped Emerson — sufficiently noticed in the *Atlantic*, and the "pen-and-ink" St. Gaudens — to be noticed hereafter, in *Scribner* for June.

What we ought to understand by the *conception* of the Bewick school I am at a loss to conceive. The knowledge may not be necessary for the nineteenth century. Twenty years hence some *Nation* Reviewer may explain, and tell us also how elaboration of useless work and multiplication of meaningless lines betray their tendency towards directness of method. The nature of my present subject may excuse me from following the Reviewer further into chiaroscuro. He is probably as clear in his obscurity there as in his perception of black and white. Only I may inform him that he is wrong as to the exceeding size of such works. They are not larger

than many things in what he calls outline. Dürer's *Arch of Maximilian* measures some *ten feet each way*. I speak from recollection, not actual measurement.

Does an innocent reader wonder that the editor of the *Nation* can publish such a farrago? What is a poor editor to do? Mostly or nearly omniscient, he does not know everything. Of engraving on wood I may safely assert that an editor is sometimes without extensive knowledge. What can he do, when our subscribers have to be told concerning it? O'C. writes readably on art-subjects; he has the run of the studios, has crammed himself with art-nomenclature, knows what *gnache* is, and is up to *scumbling*. So O'C. is detailed for an article concerning wood-engraving.

Having studied the cookery-book, he first catches his engraver. Honest man, he goes at once to head-quarters for the information that shall put a soul into his periods. Now we engravers, "the most industrious of workers," if we may not drink like draughtsmen, or Reviewers, are not universally inaccessible to beer. Although an Englishman, I can drink some myself. In the present difficulty the talismanic words, instead of *Open Sesame*, are *Zwei Lager*. Behold us inside the cave, embryo Reviewer (only interviewer as yet) and his captured instructor, seated at some round or square table in a quiet corner, where unmolested we may pursue our studies,

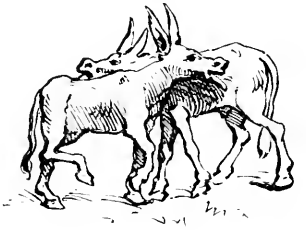
make inquiries, and note down replies; only occasionally interrupting our research with the cabalistic sign of two fingers held up bar-ward, when fresh draughts of the soothing if not inspiring fluid help us on our dreary way. How many afternoons must be devoted before such a mass of information as that three cents' worth in the *Sun* can be noted down, the mere fruit of inquiry gathered, to be afterwards pressed and strained and watered, shall we say also fusil-oiled to give the required pungency? — and then the vintage fresh from the wood served out through the editorial tap! Is it not rather a wonder that newspaper readers are put in possession of so much; which, if they cannot understand, they yet in their noble simplicity may believe to be very good? Only I would advise them not implicitly to trust even the little they may think intelligible. Interviewers may be experts; but their evidence would not stand as such in a court of law. See what a mess both *Sun* and *Nation* have made of this engraving matter! Do not imagine that they are singularly unfortunate. An editor cannot help it. He can but pick up his man, see that his English is tolerable, and keep *unnecessary* personalities out of his paper. That last item it were well if he supervised more religiously.

For the rest, reviews are not always so honestly obtained and furnished as that of our accomplished cellar-

man. Private malice (of which the editor cannot be aware) may creep in. Would you care to read A's "opinion" of B's engraving, when you knew that A lay in wait for the opportunity to revile B, because B had not admired A's sister's drawings? Such petty motives do actuate Reviewers; and find encouragement in mutual-admiration societies, small semi-private clubs or coteries, whose members esteem it the whole duty of man, or woman, to laud and magnify each other, and to fall foul on all who doubt their claim to glory.

Against these abuses of reviewership there is but one safeguard and but one remedy. The safeguard is to trust no anonymous writing. The remedy will be a wholesome law against such writing. The "remedy" of an action for libel against an impecunious slanderer or a wealthy vendor of slander, is not of much avail. Honorable Reviewers of course there are, men who would disdain to let their personal feelings have weight for or against their unbiassed opinions. Capable men there are too, even in art-matters, who know the limit of their own knowledge and who would not consent to pronounce on subjects on which they had to be coached. But how shall you distinguish these while all alike consent to wear the coward's mask? The uninitiated cannot always discern a writer's style. And when the writer has no style? You fancy you have the erudition

of Mr. Shinn, and it is only the eloquence of Mr. Laffan, or *vice versâ*. It does not matter. The public is an unseeing public; and in the country of the blind Polyphemus-Anonymus bears rule as—"a Reviewer."



TWO ART CRITICS

After Holbein—from the *Praise of Folly*.

FAC-SIMILE

FAC-SIMILE, to explain for the benefit of the unscholarly, — including Reviewers who take it to mean outline, — FAC-SIMILE is a compound Latin word meaning *something done in exact likeness of something else.*

Exact likeness. Bear this in mind! A reduction or an enlargement is not a fac-simile; and when a pen-and-ink drawing is reduced even by the exactest photography, and so placed on the wood, the engraving can only be a fac-simile of the photograph. It is not a fac-simile of the original pen-and-ink drawing. A noteworthy instance of the mistake of supposing a reduction to be a fac-simile is to be found in the *History of Wood-engraving* by Jackson and Chatto. Jackson, to show the character of the plank-blocks, gives a representation of one — a Rubens. The size of the original block is perhaps two feet by sixteen inches. He reduces it to about three

inches by two. Of course the reduced cut, not being a fac-simile, gives the design and nothing more; does not show the style of work, and so is worthless for the purpose for which he took it — as an example of plank-cutting.

Fac-simile, as applied to engraving on wood, means that the drawing or photograph on the wood is chiefly in lines, which lines should be distinct, not blurred, or rubbed in confusedly. Whatever of rubbing in or blurring, or of what is called *tint* (washing in with a brush), is in the drawing is so much of departure from pure fac-simile. These clear and definite lines the engraver has to faithfully preserve, so as to produce by his engraving an exact repetition of the drawing or photograph. An outline-drawing must be cut in fac-simile; but a fac-simile is not necessarily an outline-drawing. Plate I (engraved by E. J. Whitney from a drawing by John Gilbert, one of the artist's early drawings before success and newspaper haste had led him into carelessness) we will here consider as an example of fac-simile work, the exact representation of Gilbert's lines with the exception — the exception proving the rule — of some small portions which I proceed to point out. The constable's waistcoat, the shadow over the basket and under the old woman's cloak, the shadow of the basket-handle on her arm, a little bit under the basket, the shadowed

PLATE I

face of the boy in front, some slight shadow on the two distant figures at the right of the cut, and it may be the level sky, are engraved in regular lines, indicating that Gilbert had merely rubbed in those parts, trusting to the engraver to render his effect with suitable lines. The rest may be considered as exact to the drawing, cleanly cut, line for line — very excellent work. I do not mean that there is any pretence of passing it off as the likeness of a pencil-drawing. Gilbert's lines, many of them, were certainly grey; and in the printed cut, however delicately printed, the most delicate lines are black. I have known men draw with a silver point, so that their firmest lines were grey, not black; and a photograph, even from a black-line drawing, may be not black, but brown, on the wood. It is therefore not a mock pencil-drawing or sham photograph which the exact engraver produces, but a fair and, so nearly as his mechanical skill enables him, a close reproduction in black lines of the grey lines of the pencil, the brown lines of the photograph, or the positive black lines (but even here some lines may not have been really black) of the pen-and-ink drawing.

On the first rude plank-blocks — I suppose on all — the drawings were made with brush or pen in bold, firm, unvarying black lines, with little crossing of the lines. Gravers could not be used on the plank, as the grain would rough up, or the wood split and rend, ac-

cording to the direction in which you attempted to cut. All this old work was done with knives, and gouges for the broader lights or masses of white; and as the work became more difficult, from the greater elaboration or minuteness of the drawings, variously-shaped knives, and gouges of different sizes to clear out the larger spaces, came into use.

The earliest of these plank-blocks, on which, before the invention of movable types, both picture and lettering were cut, were very rude. Any boy could cut such. When purists go into ecstasies over the noble engraving-work from Dürer's drawings, they do but ignorantly rave and imagine a vain thing. The designs are noble, and the drawing; but the *engraving* is only mechanism, not always skilled mechanism. The cutting here-beneath

is a tolerably close copy of part of an engraving from the *Greater Passion*, and may serve to show the character of the best work on these plank-blocks. Skilful indeed is the mechanism of the cuts of Holbein's *Dance of Death*. Wonderfully minute and precise and delicate must have been Holbein's touch; and one would hesitate before denying to workmen who could perceive and preserve that delicacy some title to be considered artists. Notwithstanding, if there is — and surely there is — a distinction to be insisted on between the *artist* and the *mechanic*, we can but at last place the producers of even such consummate workmanship, at the head of the mechanical class certainly, but not higher. Excepting these Holbeins and very little else of the old time, Japanese cutting of to-day, of the same character, is quite as good as that so lauded and beloved of purists; and some quite recent German work far more skilful, of such clearness and delicacy as scarcely to be distinguished from the best fac-simile done with the graver.

Bewick's work was all graver-work (if any one used the graver on wood before him, I do not know), cut on the end of the grain, on rounds, or parts of rounds of boxwood, a wood chosen because, while hard and close-grained, it yet is easily cut. The old plank-blocks were of pear, lime, or some other kind of soft wood, more easily cut and so more suitable for knife-work.

Bewick's work was in white-line; that is, his drawing being made with a brush, and perhaps some little definition with a pencil, he trusted to his graver for the rest, inventing the requisite lines as he went on. Of this white-line work I shall speak later. I confine myself now to fac-simile — the leaving of lines drawn, as in Plate I and other cuts, Dürer's, etc., of which I have spoken.

Branston (contemporary with Bewick, though not quite so early) and his school, also used the graver; and since them English, French, and American engravers have done the same. They were using knife-tools in Paris sixty years ago, when Charles Thompson, a younger brother of John, went there to establish himself as an engraver. In Germany I am not sure that knives, as well as gravers, are not used even to the present day.

Branston and Thompson engraved in both white-line and fac-simile. I use the word fac-simile in contradistinction to white-line because in both cases the engraving is printed in black: and the talk of "black-outline" as the opposite of white-line is meaningless.

Thurston's drawings for John Thompson, in which Thompson's excellence as an engraver was first manifested, were, I believe, drawn line for line on the wood, as if he were etching on a plate, only with the regularity of line to which a line-engraver is educated and which

the freer-handed etcher avoids. I do not say that all were so drawn, though I have seen such from his hand. Thompson probably did not cut any in quite absolute fac-simile, because in most of his work, certainly in all his later work, there is the stamp of his own individuality; and Thurston, no doubt, knowing Thompson's ability in white-line, would have often spared himself the drawing of mere lines, trusting to Thompson to draw with his graver the sufficient equivalent — a more regular tint. In the parts I noted as exceptional in Plate I, the same license is observable. That combination of the two styles, so impossible for the *Nation* critic to conceive, is to be seen there, as it is throughout Thompson's Thurston-work; the fac-simile not absolutely exact, but only departed from as taste and judgment ordered, when the engraver's own white-line was brought into use. Inferior to Bewick as an artist, claiming no originality as a designer, John Thompson is unequalled as an engraver. The same taste and judgment are recognizable in Plate I and in the cut at page 69. "Washed drawings," however, from Bewick's first beginning were in common use, — drawings in tints, for which the engraver had to design the representative lines. Drawings on wood were either such, or else generally of the mixed fac-simile I have described as Thurston's, in which the copper-plate "line-engraving" was taken as pattern. So the absolute

fac-simile of the old plank-cutters went somewhat out of fashion, but certainly never out of use. The Cruikshanks and Seymour maintained its reputation. Every apprentice was taught to master fac-simile before venturing on his own lines. The kind of "fac-simile" for which the brothers Dalziel were famous, and with which I have found fault, was not, as an ignorant Reviewer has stated, a "resuscitation" of the old plank-work; and though it is true that I compared it with that *as being only mechanical*, I never spoke of it as reaching to any even mechanical excellence. The manufacturers to whom I objected did not indeed cut in fac-simile (*exact following of the drawing*); but were content to leave unmeaning wood, "near enough," in place of drawn lines, as the following diagrams will explain.

A

A — Dürer-work: lines cut by a careful knife-user of the early time: an exact reproduction (that is, fac-simile) of the lines drawn. Good graver-work is of the same character.

B

B — Dalziel-work. The same lines as in A, but as they would be engraved by the near-enough fac-simile school; which a well-trained Chinese rat would gnaw out with more nearness. The example is of course much magnified, as the difference might pass unnoticed in very "fine" — that is to say, minute work.

This (B) is the pretence of fac-simile against which I have always striven as deteriorating and demoralizing the worker, whatever excuse might be found for it in the unintelligibility and worthlessness of the confused network of lines with which Leech and Gilbert, and other hasty or slovenly or careless draughtsmen, covered so large a portion of their drawings. For Leech, if he rarely considered a line (proof, the *Sun* critic thinks, of his certainty of hand), it was not because it did not need consideration, but because he had not the faculty, wanting an artist's education: which is not underrating his natural artistic gift.

In course of time the Dalziel rats improved, and at last turned out some really good fac-simile work, clean, honest, and minute, but at best mechanical. The mechanics in *Punch* also improved, in a great measure owing to the careful drawings of Tenniel.

It is good fac-simile work, however mechanical, when the lines are so cleanly cut that they look like steel-engraving, whether laid regularly and designedly as in a "line-engraving," or loosely and easily (not carelessly) as in a good etching. Of course there can be good fac-simile rendering of even a careless drawing; the engraver's skill thrown away on it, as on the Jefferson and the St. Gaudens, in *Scribner* (July and June). The test of good work is readily applied, even by the most ignorant

of inquirers. Refer again to examples A and B, at page 34. The best pure fac-simile work I know of at the present day will be found occasionally in the German illustrated papers. I call to mind, though I cannot at this writing place them for reference, certain portraits which might fairly pass for engravings on steel,* the highest praise I can give to works of such perfect mechanism. But note that all this is mechanism, and not art.

The Dalziel-work is, I think, sufficiently shown to be not fac-simile at all. Using the term "Dalziel-work," I am merely giving a name to the whole class of dishonest, "near-enough" pretence of following lines, without any real care to maintain them in their purity, — work which I have already described, which the Dalziel establishment was, I think, mainly instrumental in popularizing, although it is to be seen also in the early numbers of *Punch*, and wherever else cheap cutting was thought good enough for the publisher's purpose. I would by no means lay all the responsibility upon the

* Lest the Reviewer suppose that this contradicts what I said in the *Atlantic*, that *it is no flattery to have a wood-engraving supposed to be on steel*, I would observe that I am here speaking of *only fac-simile*, the mechanical excellence of which cannot be other than an imitation of metal-work. In all but this *mechanical* fac-simile, wood-work has its own peculiar excellence, which ought not to be mistaken.

Dalziels, and mention their name, as I name also Leech and Gilbert, only as representative. They were not the only sinners. And here, lest again I be taken to task for spite and personal animosity, by some gentle-souled Reviewer, I embrace the occasion to declare that I mean no disrespect personally to the brothers Dalziel, men, so far as I had opportunity of judging of them (and I was not without opportunity), honorable and of considerable talent, and I suppose not without artistic instincts and care for reputation as artists. Nevertheless they seem, to me, in this matter of engraving to have preferred success in business to success in art. It is said you cannot serve God and Mammon. Their art has suffered accordingly, and their example has been harmful to engraving in general. Something has to be said, too, not only of the carelessness, but also of the foolishness of painters who, insisting on their every line being kept, could not see or did not notice that it was kept only in appearance, not in reality. Take notice again of

I have praised the German work for its likeness to steel. Strictly speaking, all absolutely fac-simile work, from

Dürer's to the latest *Scribner*, is but an imitation of steel (or copper), a rendering, by wood left on the surface, of the lines which in a steel engraving are indented. The one reason for having such work done on wood is that it can be printed with type. It never can rival the delicacy of steel.

In artistic worth, beyond this exact fac-simile is the rendering of line-drawings (in outline or with complication of lines) in which the very line itself has variety and feeling: not to be seen in the work of the ordinary draughtsman. Such lines will be found in pencil-drawings by Flaxman or Mulready; and in some little pen-and-ink outlines by Stothard, in Rogers' *Poems*, mentioned in my *Atlantic* article. No mere mechanic could perceive or without perceiving reproduce the subtle beauty of these last. Thompson, the master of the graver, was not artist enough for that; and the advantage an artist may have even in "mechanical" work was shown by Clennell's rendering of some of these. I have them by three hands. One man, only a mechanic, missed their beauty altogether: yet I dare say the unartistic critic and purist might have praised him for his exact reproduction of the drawing, and found a noble simplicity in his work. Thompson, perhaps from his very mastership not caring for close exactitude, also missed the beauty of touch in the originals. Of course

he came very much nearer than the mechanic: but the cuts are Thompson's. Only Clennell reproduced Stothard. The one man could stamp the mark of his own genius and individuality upon them. His was a higher art who forgot himself in his work.

I speak of this (not able to give specimens, and knowing that the work is too scarce for reference) to show that I appreciate and to obtain appreciation for the difficulty of engraving even the simplest work; and to emphasize the necessity of artistic feeling in everything that is to bear the name of Art. I return to Plate I, having yet some remarks to make on the already indicated differences of fac-simile.

Observe especially the lines on the right thigh of the constable. They are probably line for line *where* Gilbert drew them; but yet they are not his lines, nor could he have drawn such. They are graver-lines. They are not merely mechanical rendering, nor only the regular lines in place of rubbing-in which I elsewhere distinguished; they are such artistic work as Thompson put in his Thurston drawings. The same sort of rendering will be found wherever the engraver is the equal of the draughtsman. He does not servilely, Chinese-like, repeat each individual line. Where the draughtsman has halted or slipped, drawn falsely or insufficiently, he takes his place, enters into the spirit of his work, corrects, and can some-

times more truthfully express the real intention of the original even in what we have called, and for distinction's sake must call, fac-simile.

So I would lead the student of wood-engraving to understand that of "fac-simile" there are four kinds: —

1 — Absolutely exact mechanical rendering: whether of the old plank-cutting, or as in ordinary good graver-work since. An excellent example of the last may be found in *Scribner* for August: Jungling's "Riault the Engraver," page 488.

2 — Equally exact but artistic rendering (for there is artistic exactness as well as mechanical exactness) of such exceptional drawings as the Stothards: the nearest to which in the mechanical class are the cuts in Holbein's *Dance of Death*. No classification can be perfectly correct. Only we must sometimes classify, to get through comparison at clearness of judgment.

3 — Not exact rendering, but artistic modification and translation of even clearly-drawn lines, which I may call the Thompson manner: such as I have noted in his rendering of the Stothards and throughout his Thurston-work. This kind also may be seen in Plate I.

4 — Unexact, careless, dirty, "near-enough" rendering: which passes as fac-simile only with as careless observers or those who are utterly ignorant of engraving. Unartistic, and without even mechanical correctness, such

work (as my reader will now perceive) is not really fac-simile, the indispensable condition of which, whether mechanical or artistic, is clearness of line, especially where lines cross.

I have perhaps said enough to enable an intelligent reader to know what engraving-in-fac-simile is. I pass on to white-line work, the true and more distinctive province of wood-engraving. In saying which I am happily not contradicted by the Reviewers.

PEN AND INK.

WHITE-LINE

WHITE-LINES in wood are produced — as the Reviewer has informed us — by taking pieces of wood out of a plain wood-surface, called a block by wood-engravers, with a "graver," a tool used for that purpose. You can, according to the size of the graver and the energic force of your hand, take or cut out a small piece or a large piece, and cut a short line or a long line; and wherever these pieces are taken out, be they round or square or of shape most indescribable, be they narrow or broad, or short or long, when you ink the block (the effect the same on a plank) and press it firmly upon paper, *there* will be white specks or lines, — the rest of the impression, if you have ink and impression enough, being "strong" black. From my friend the *Nation* Reviewer's attempt at explanation I gather or deduce so much: and speaking as a practical engraver, I may say the description is correct. I hope it is as

intelligible as true. Plate II (the *Crucifixion*, a copy of a wood-cut, or metal plate engraved wood-fashion, by the hand of the poet-painter William Blake) shows exactly what "white-line" is.

It will at once be noticed that, though the black in this engraving is not any stronger than the black in Plate I, or than the black in the printed letters of this sentence, yet there is much black. There would of course have been less black if more of the wood had been cut away, as in Plates III and IV; still less had so much been cut away as in Plate I: but in all these four engravings, and though we call the first (Plate I) black-line (say fac-simile) and the other three white-line, the process is one and the same. In fact a wood-engraving (till *Scribner* shall help us with some *new* invention) is only producible *by cutting away what you mean to be white and leaving what you intend to be black*. So far the procedure is the very reverse of what is known as engraving on steel or copper: albeit it will easily be understood that the wood-method can be followed on metal also,—not so conveniently, metal being harder than wood. It *is* followed on steel and copper and brass when for certain purposes the metal is required. The English penny postage-stamp, a very beautiful piece of work, was (if my recollection is not at fault) engraved on metal by John Thompson, the wood-engraver. Book-binders' ornamental tools, or

stamps, on metal — as they have to resist heat, are engraved in the same manner. To return to wood.

This cutting away of whites and leaving blacks being the necessity of surface-printed wood-engraving, in what consists the difference between fac-simile as already described and "white line"? In this: — In the first the engraver, as already said, having his lines laid down by the pencil, pen, etc., has only to outline such lines with his graver (of old his knife) and then to clear away to sufficient depth (that the ink may not touch it) the intervening wood. There may be scope in fac-simile, as has been already shown, for artistic as well as for mechanical treatment, but the engraver is still more or less closely confined to certain lines. In what we call white-line work the engraver has only a tinted, or washed, drawing on the wood, with perhaps some penciling, part, it may be, rubbed in and part in lines, chiefly with the purpose of better defining those portions which the draughtsman did not consider sufficiently made out. Here the engraver is raised from being the humble follower of the draughtsman into an equality with him, having now to furnish the lines which shall best represent the unlined drawing. That is to say, he must draw with his graver. Bewick would not have troubled himself to draw a feather line for line; whether he drew it with brush or pencil, he left the lines for his

graver. It was a freër method of working. And now notice the result! Had he drawn line for line, those black lines (black when printed) had given him only a poor imitation of a copper-plate. Almost the best fac-simile must suffer in comparison. Perhaps even Bewick's best had done so. But when he drew in white-line, he found out a new style altogether, and *invented engraving-on-wood*. The old style — the imitation of copper — was not lost or abandoned; the engraver could still use that when he would (though Bewick himself paid little or no heed to it): but the new method gave him a power unknown before. With the use of this new power engraving-on-wood became a distinct art.

Observe now that this method rules throughout the engravings I give here as specimens — Plates II. III, IV, and also in the cuts on pages 53, 81. Do not at present mind about their merit as engravings. Be they never so bad, they may serve to sufficiently explain what I have to say. They are all in white-line: without any admixture of fac-simile except what I shall presently note in one of them.

The method employed in Plate II (the white line on the black, which is all the engraving there is) is plain enough. It is the same method carried out in the rest.

Notice next Plate III (the good grey poet, Walt Whitman) engraved from a tinted and slightly penciled draw-

ing by the late Edward Skill. In the lighter portions of the beard some fac-simile lines will be seen (you will find such in the lightest parts of most wood-engravings); but with that exception all is white-line. The edges of the beard and hair are plainly enough seen to be that; and white cross lines on the forehead and elsewhere will be easily discovered by unprofessional eyes: but the whole cut throughout, save the few lines of beard before noted) is done in the same manner. It is the white line on which the engraver depended for his drawing, not attending to or caring for or thinking of any particular black line to be retained or given: it was with the white line that he drew and defined and endeavored to express everything, whether the modeling of the features, the texture of the coat, or the mere color in the tint behind.

Now look at Plate IV (from Bryant's *Flood of Years*). Drawn and engraved by me, it is very likely "feeble and monotonous"; but as the draughtsman I may know whether my engraving reproduced the drawing. There again (which is all I care to maintain at present) all is white-line. The drawing was, like the Whitman, nearly all tint, with only a few pencil outlines of the flowers. The flowers, grass, trees, are all drawn in white-line by the graver. The falling water is the same. So far will be seen at once. But the engraver will also see that the level water, the distance, and the sky, are cut in the same

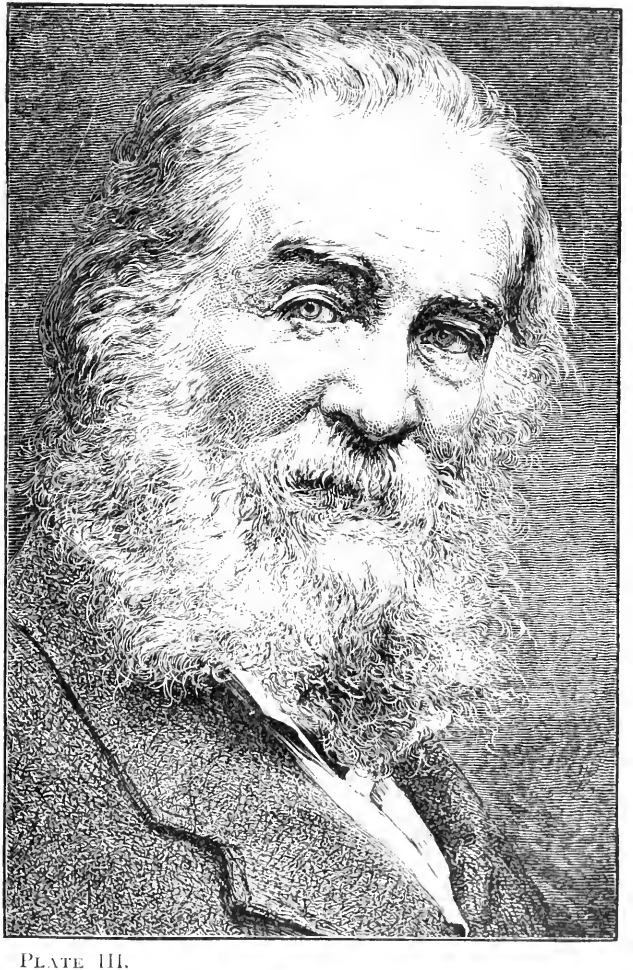


PLATE III.

PLATE IV.

way. Dislike the design, wish it were more forcible or definite (not aware that the dreamy indistinctness is in accordance with the poet's words), be quite certain that it is very badly engraved, — all that as may please you, gentle reader or Reviewer! What I want you to see now is that it is drawn with the graver, and to understand that this is properly *white-line*. The cut below,

as opposite to these, — though my Reviewer may not see the difference and may think it no worse than my chosen specimens of good engraving, — is given in order that I may make this remark: — whether good or bad, failing or succeeding, the graver-work in my own cuts is *drawn*, with intention and design; the work in this other is without design. It too is white-line work, *as all wood-engraving except fac-simile must be:* but the white lines here are not drawn. The practised engraver knew that certain closeness of line, or largeness of wood, would produce certain color, and availed himself of that knowledge: but for the meaning of each particular line he was without an artist's care: so that he has only filled his spaces with cut or left lines; fairly keeping the general effect of the draughtsman, but losing the form and meaning in which the value of the drawing, what may more properly be called *the drawing*, consisted.

In direct contrast to this, notice the cut at page 69, by Charlton Nesbit, a pupil of Bewick, and the engraver of much of the best work that passes under the name of Bewick; the best *engraver* of the Bewick school, though as an artist far inferior to his master and to Clennell. Printed from an electrotype, the original block repeatedly used and much worn, the fresh beauty of the block is lost, the outer lines being battered to pieces: still it may

serve to illustrate my point. It is from a drawing by Thurston, the figures perhaps drawn almost in fac-simile. Compare it especially with Plate I. It will show you how hard it is to classify. This by Nesbit is — except of course the mere outlines — *all white-line work*; and yet Plate I, which cannot be classed except as fac-simile, has (as I noted before) work in it of the same Thompson-like, Thurston-like, white-line character. It is indeed scarcely possible, except in purely mechanical work, to avoid that "inconceivable" combination of the two styles.

With these remarks for your guidance, go now and examine for yourself! Whether in *Scribner* or *Harper*, in newspaper or book, the same laws and limitations hold good. Lines engraved with design may be bad or good, according to the artistic intelligence or the capacity of the engraver; but lines engraved without design — that is, meaningless lines — are certain marks of unartistic engraving.

There is of course a question of degree.

How bold or how fine the lines should be in an engraving from a washed drawing is reserved for the judgment of the engraver, depending in some respect on the purpose for which the engraving is to be used, and the care to be given in printing it. There would be no advantage in "fine" work where the printing had to be hurried or without care and best materials. One would not

have the work in Harper's *Monthly Magazine* so bold as that in the *Weekly Newspaper*. Yet the bolder work might be, and should be, as artistic as the minuter and less bold (called finer). Also it may be left entirely to the engraver's judgment — overriding even the opinion of an art-student — to decide what kind or kinds of line may be most fitting to represent his subject. On such points opinions and tastes may differ. But on one point there is no room for variance of opinion: that *every line should show design: without which the work is not work of Art.*

And here to say something of variety and purpose of line. *Scribner's* Reviewer continually repeats the word *legitimate* as mine, and as representing my bigoted adherence to some indefinite conventional system of line. I have never anywhere used the word, having no respect for its meaning. Nor have I ever (as the Boston *Post* asserts) "taken the ground that there is only one way to attain satisfactory results." An artist has the right to make any experiments. All roads are right that will lead him to the Eternal City. Go your own way, my boy! Only when you find yourself on the direct road to Jericho, with your back toward Rome, it may be well to turn. The right to prove all things, only holding fast to what is good (a right I have cared to exercise as much as most men), shuts the word *legitimate* out of

my vocabulary. There are however foolish experiments: there is also the folly of repeating experiments already tried and found worthless, or of persisting in what *was* experiment till it becomes a *manner* — of which in art there is always a dangerous likelihood.

Something has to be said in defence of what is called conventional. It is not enough to sneer at it as "sacred common-place" while bowing down with trembling adoration before the young Conceit that would rule in its stead. Grammar is but conventional: based however on certain laws of language, studied and known to some extent, if not absolutely determined. The laws of poetry are conventional. Men may eccentrically escape from them; but it is not given to every one to invent a new rhythmic system. And so though I or any other engraver may be free to try any experiments in line, it may not be certain, is not perhaps likely, that we shall altogether supersede the collective results of the many quite as clever experimenters whose rules — I will not say laws — have been codified for our restriction. The traditions of an earlier time, the records of others' opinions, have some worth in them whatever the acknowledged right of individual conscience. It is not by ignoring the past that the world progresses.

Certain conventional lines in engraving, invented before Timotheus Cole was, even before the fossil era of W. J.

Linton, and adopted because they were found to be expressive, may yet be valuable. A curved line will better represent roundness than a straight line can; a rough line will help to distinguish a rough surface; a perpendicular line may not be so suitable for water as a horizontal line, unless indeed it be falling water. I perhaps would not cut Niagara Falls with a horizontal line; albeit, "sacredly common-place," "bigoted," and "conservative" as I am, I myself have tried some curious experiments. If you were drawing waves with a pencil you would naturally follow in some measure their flow and form: that is if you had perceived so much. If you were drawing with chalk or pencil a hand or face, you would find yourself soon imitating the roundness of a projecting part or hollow with corresponding curved lines. Your mere thought of the form, your first attempt at outlining it, dictates the after course; and the law that governs such almost instinctive action is at the base of all good lining for engraving. The man who cannot see the beauty and propriety of this harmonious identification of work with its subject, who sees no beauty in line, ay! even in mere regularity and the pleasant accordance of lines one with another, is not an artist, can never become a first-rate engraver, and is as unfitted to give an opinion on engraving as a man color-blind to judge of painting.

Unfitted to judge it *as engraving*. A painter may be a good painter and yet not educated in engraving. He may be content to see his picture represented with a certain uncouth or bare literal fidelity, because either he is afraid of his engraver, or he is careless of the graces of engraving, or he is not aware that anything better can be done. He has a perfect right to say, "That satisfies me;" but is not therefore necessarily competent to judge of the merits of "that" *as an engraving*. He does not call a photograph art, however closely it may repeat his work; and he may mistake when he thinks the engraved copy of his picture to be art instead of tolerably successful mechanism.

We have already crossed the threshold of that vexatious question — What is art in engraving, and how to be known from what is only mechanical?

MECHANISM AND ART

SAYS the æsthetic young man of the *Times*, preparing the way before himself or Dr. Holland for the repetition in *Scribner* of his *Times* argument — "The proof of the pudding is in the eating"; look at our cuts in our June number, and see how decidedly they refute Mr. Linton's criticism of the cuts in former numbers! Exultingly he points to the later work, which he pronounces excellent: *because* "we perceive at once" that one (Vedder's *Marsyas*) "was from a drawing"; another (Chapu's *Gratitude*) "gives the feeling of bronze"; a third (Dubois' *Charity*) "tells us immediately that the original was plaister or clay"; and a fourth (from a pen-and-ink sketch by St. Gaudens after Dubois' statue of *Faith*) is "faithfully reproduced" so that it cannot be mistaken for anything except pen-and-ink. This, says our young man, authoritatively summing up, "is realism," and (rather

inconsequently) "idealism may be better on general principles. But it is all very well to talk of the ideal engravers. Where are they?" Also, "artists have an unaccountable dislike to free translation." And further, not quite complimentarily to the magazine he is paid to praise, — "Why make such a pother over magazine illustrations? It is absurd to clamor about high art over the wood-cuts of the monthly press. . . . The magazines are mediums for experiments." *In corpore vili*, etc. Swallow then your *Scribner* "pudding," which is *experimental* and not *high art*; and be grateful for new "progressive" methods of reproducing clay and plaister, charcoal and pen-and-ink!

What does the reader learn from this, which is a fair statement of the *Times* argument? On my honor as an engraver, I can get nothing out of it except the suspicion that the young man was ignorantly — mixed. If it means anything, it would seem to be this: that *Scribner* must not be looked to for high-art; and that, owing to the unaccountable dislike of artists to free translation and the paucity of ideal engravers, the make-shift of what he miscalls realism is to be put up with as the best we can get. "Call you this backing of your friends?" If he means so much — I find nothing else under his verbiage — he is not of much service to his patrons. But let him go, while we consider this "realism," which also he names

"impressionism," the best to be had now, when artists have such dislikes and engravers are so scarce.

The Vedder (indeed a very excellent cut) might, for all an engraver could tell (but your critic sees through millstones), have been engraved from a photograph; the "bronze" drapery on the figures in the Chapu is as like glazed calico — brown calico — as bronze; the Charity (I speak charitably) might have been cast in sugar instead of plaister, or modeled in cheese instead of clay, — being as like to any one material as to the other; and the St. Gaudens, — i'faith, having lost most of "the feeling" of the original pen-and-ink by reduction, has had all remaining likeness cut out of it by the engraver. This is "realism" or "impressionism." *O tempora! O mores!* O young man of the *Times!* O wonderful experimental realistic methods!

Yet let us for a moment suppose that my adverse criticism is unjust: that bronze and clay and pencil and charcoal and pen-and-ink are as accurately represented as the *Times* assumes. What then? What is your first object in looking at an engraving of a statue? Is it to know that the particular original of the engraving was the clay or marble, or a pen-and-ink sketch? Or is it to obtain some idea of the beauty of the statue? If in the engraving Jeanne d'Arc has a claw instead of a hand, will you be better satisfied for being told that — "the

engraving faithfully reproduces the texture of the clay in which the sculptor had modeled" — not a claw, but a hand? Is this realism? Do you care to have the feeling of bronze if you get no feeling of the statue? Is this "impressionism"? I take realism to mean something true, not a falsehood. The impression I desire to have is of the essential, not of an accident. What care I whether the Marsyas was engraved from a drawing by Vedder's own hand, or from a drawing by some one else, or from a photograph, if I have a trustworthy representation of the picture? If Mr. Cole's cut contents me, shall I like it better for being told that the critic "can perceive" it is from a drawing; or would it be any more or less to my liking if I could myself perceive that curious but unimportant phenomenon of critical apprehension? What is it to me if I get a tolerable representation of Mr. Dubois' Faith, whether Mr. St. Gaudens sketched it in pen-and-ink, or somebody else in charcoal or guache? You might as well expect me to be interested in the information that Mr. St. Gaudens wore an olive-colored blouse and smoked so many cigars during his pen-and-ink performance. Whether you call this realism or impressionism, it is not Art.

But we have "secured entirely new effects!" "In these has lived the charm of the engravings of *Scribner's Magazine*." — I pause to say emphatically, I do not

choose *Scribner's Magazine* as a target. With the Scribner firm my relations have never been other than friendly; nor have I any unfriendly feelings now. My first important work in this country was for them — Dr. Holland's *Kathrina;* and no one is more earnest than myself in according to the author of *Kathrina* and his coadjutors full credit for the enterprise and liberality which have made the history of *Scribner's Monthly* remarkable among magazines. All this I gladly admit: but it is no reason why I should not condemn editorial fallacies in art matters; nor why I should refrain from pointing out — not "picking" out — the growing faults which, to my thinking, are in the way of continued success.

I do not choose it as a target. It is not my fault that in *Scribner* I found the Cole heads, that in *Scribner* I now read the defence — say rather the indiscriminate eulogy of this pretentious "realism." And when I contrasted certain cuts in *Harper* with others in *Scribner*, it surely was not to pit the magazines against each other, but because at the time of my writing I there most readily found the contrast, a contrast which in the interest of Art I had to notice. After which acknowledgment, I must even go back to have another gird at *Scribner*.

New effects have there been secured, chiefly by the aid of photography: such as "the effect of a charcoal drawing" — impossible to be produced "by what Mr. Linton

regards as legitimate line-engraving:" "the reproduction of a drawing in pencil" — the "raciness and character" of which Mr. Linton's line would utterly have spoiled. Another cut "tells the simple truth as it is in clay." Then there is a picture in which "the attempt is made to reproduce the effect of a work mostly done in washes." This last a most remarkable novelty!

It all reads sadly like the patter of an amateur. Still, for conscience' sake, to deal quite fairly, I turn back to the February number, to see if I have not been mistaking. Honestly, with hard endeavor I cannot see anything like clay, or charcoal, or pencil, or washes, in the specimens referred to. The pencil-likeness I may miss from not knowing exactly in what the "raciness" of pencil consists. But I have tried earnestly to see the declared merits. I would not have minded seeing them: for it would not have affected my argument that all these accomplishments would be worth next to nothing. Even the great Wyatt-Eaton portraits, in which the *Sun* tells me the "peculiar quality of crayon-work" was reproduced by Mr. Cole with such "wonderful fidelity" — "and his treatment of it was really marvelous," failed to impress me as being particularly like crayon-work. They looked to me more like bad lithographs, with a machine-ruled tint behind some. I own however that Mr. Cole did full justice to those "indifferently executed portraits" (*Sun*).

though with "more fine engraving" (not good because fine) "than artistic effect, but that was the fault of the artist, and not of the engraver" (*Sun* again). Why again "sit down upon" Mr. Cole? Because already he has been bettered by my prescription. At least he knows now the nature of his malady; and though he may yet for a while, like Naaman, bow down in the house of Rimmon, I think he may be cured of his leprosy and that it will not cleave to him for ever. In his last portrait, of Whittier (*Scribner*, August), is great improvement. There is good lining on the face, and the face is not hairy. There is indeed the same error of extreme fineness, in which I suppose he is ordered to persist; and this mars the clearness of the engraving, giving it the appearance of a worn-out steel-plate instead of the "marvelous crayon-work" of former heads. Any way, it is an improvement.

Notwithstanding his "noble simplicity," his "outlines," and his "purists," the *Nation* Critic has some inkling of the truth of my animadversions here: for "the opinions of this journal in art-matters have always been based upon the constant reiteration of the importance — the necessity of developing each art in its own native direction. Thin iron cornices that simulate cut stone, lithography that tries to pass for painting, *wood-cuts that ape the graces of other arts*, are all an offence to us, and *are to be characterized as not art at all in the true sense*."

Good for the *Nation!* Saul has actually slipped in among the prophets. "Wood-cuts that ape the graces of other arts," that imitate worn-out copper-plate and bad lithography (hardly to be considered graces), that *ape* the graces of pencil and pen-and-ink, crayon and charcoal and washed tints, not to speak of clay and bronze and marble, "are to be characterized as *not art at all in the true sense*." I am glad to get so much corroboration.

Yet another word. If you did secure these marvelous effects which tell *the critical student* "of the truth as it is in clay," or give him something else to be immediately perceived by him, what good is it when the public cannot see them? Like that famous relic, the single hair of the Saint which he who showed saw not, are the "marvelous effects" of your show-man. The effects are not there. A pencil-drawing cannot be reproduced to deceive any one who knows what pencil-drawing is. The beauty peculiar to it is in the greyness of its lines: in your mock-pencil the lines are all black. You lighten them by dotting: but the pencil does not make dotted lines. The same with charcoal or crayon. There is no mistaking an engraving for either, except by a critical art-student, the Reviewer who always sees what he wants to see. It is mainly through the interference of these amateurs without understanding that the generally more correct instinct of the uneducated is perverted.

The great mischief of all this clay and charcoal rubbish is that the public is taught to value the non-essential more than the essential, and the young artist, finding a readier market that way, gets to care chiefly for astonishing the world with his "marvelous" puerilities. All which is a symptom of decadence in Art, not a sign of growth. Allowed the full merit of mechanical or merely technical excellence, allowed also that these experiments may be good schooling *for the hand*, what avails all that if you lose sight even of what Art is? The *Nation* critic thinks he sees in this idolatrous adoration of the Mechanical a tendency "to work back" to the worship of true Art. There may be a tendency through falsehood to reaction; but meanwhile the working backwards is not exactly progressive.

After all I may be wrong, blinded by age and prejudice to the worth of these peculiar specimens; they may, despite my judgment to the contrary, be very perfect imitations of racy pencil-work, and of that novel style of drawing in washes, lying dormant all these eighty years since Bewick. I surely dream when I suppose that I have seen washed drawings even before they could be photographed on the wood for the sake of yet closer verisimilitude than could be had by putting them directly on the wood. Let me wake up and accept the new phase of realism, the worship of the Unessential. Whither

leads it? Having settled that the clay is of more importance than the statue, and the charcoal than the drawing, we proceed to represent — reproduce is the more definite realistic word — an impression of the paper or other material on which the artist made his drawing. The photograph secures for us another new effect. The artist had drawn upon a piece of grey paper. We reproduce the appearance of grey paper by a square of fine tint behind a fac-simile drawing. With that is the additional advantage that we can "engrave white paint." Or the artist had nailed his paper up by the four corners; and we engrave a "marvelously faithful" reproduction of the four nails, — more than that, even a turned-down corner of the paper. Most interesting! We frame a cut with a broad border, to show that the original was mounted; or as the picture when photographed happened to stand against a tree or on the artist's color-box, we have tree and color-box, perhaps also an umbrella or artistic wide-awake, all reproduced, not with any relation to the subject, but with a wonderful fidelity. For specimens this time, see *Harper's Monthly* for August. That is what the peculiar effects are leading us to in Art. There is no Art but only Artifice — Trick in all of it. Very pretty perhaps! There is no reason why your magazine cuts (on the theory of the *Times*, that they are not to be expected to furnish us with high art) should

not be made as pretty, as graceful, as attractive, as meretricious, as salable, as possible. There are more pleased than displeased at this sort of girl-nonsense, by perhaps a hundred to one; and the publisher is not to be asked to prefer Art to sale. But do not at the same time brag of what you are doing for Art. Such things are not Art: even by a *Nation's* allowance.

The aim of Art is expression. Wood-engraving is Art only when one begins to draw with the graver, cutting a determinate line, knowing the purpose and value of it, and with some intention of expression. Short of that the best and most elaborate work is but mechanism.

For which reason white-line work is more artistic than fac-simile. There is more scope for the graver.

There is the same thing in drawing or painting. The artistic draughtsman has drawing in his every line; the less artistic, or he who cannot draw, fills in with meaningless pencilings, or confusion. There is a kind of mechanical painting too.

The aim of Art is expression: which does not mean the display of the painter's or the engraver's eccentricities. In an engraving it means: — in the first place attention to form and drawing; then the keeping of all parts in proper relation to each other; then color and effect; then, with some care for harmonious direction of lines. texture of substances; last of all (whether as an

artist you can think it worth while, or as a hired workman you are obliged to please your employer) the "imitations" of what has really nothing to do with your engraving, — pencil, charcoal, lithography, etc. — all the little monkey-tricks which may help to astonish the multitude. The fault of the new mechanical school is that it starts at the wrong end. For that I exclaim against it. Bring, in pompous procession, with your wooden aperies borne on velvet cushions before you, with braying of monthly, weekly, or daily trumpets, etc., your little offerings of anise! It is not that which offends me. But when you block up the porch of the Temple to proclaim that you have fulfilled the Law, — then, it may be too indignantly, but moved by no personal feeling, stirred only by an artist's zeal and justifiable wrath against lies, I lift my voice in protest. Personal feeling! What does it matter to me? Perfect yourselves in mechanism! I will admire your ability. Surely I would not have you neglect that. Use multiple gravers, or what you will; cross lines, only sometimes consider the direction; try your most whimsical experiments! — your hands and eyes will be trained thereby: but do not forget that these successes are not the object of Art. Here is my quarrel with the "new school."

Which, let me also observe, may be "a grand invention," but is not original, — no, not even excepting the

multiple graver, an old explosion. All these experiments (save that, for he was an artist) William Harvey tried some fifty years ago: excessive fineness, cross-lining (but not without meaning or thought of beauty), varieties of texture, etc. His great work, a copy of Haydon's *Dentatus*, his portrait of *Johnson* the printer (in Johnson's *Typographia*), show more wonderful work, even as mechanism, than all that is now so marveled at of the Cole and Cross-line series. The difference is in the complacent content of the "new school" with merely ignoble mechanism. Harvey was seeking what new forces and appliances he could press into the service of Art.

This however is not defining the difference between *Art* and *Mechanism* in the engraving itself. To begin with a short definition: — mechanism is that which employs only the hands; art needs brains as well as hands. Art is expressive, mechanism inexpressive. Lines drawn with a graver, *with design*, have art in them, of however poor a quality: lines cut without a sense of drawing, without any consciousness of meaning, are only mechanical. Some sense of appropriateness of line will come into the artist's mind, whether he be conventionally or experimentally disposed, because he will cut nothing without thought of what it is or means; and so his work will vary according to circumstances and according to his

ability to be more or less expressive. It has been said that a good engraver can make a good cut of an indifferent drawing. That is true: also a poor engraver can make a good-looking cut of a good drawing. He need only be moderately faithful to the color drawn, and though his sky except from its position could not be distinguished from the water or the ground, though he has but one mechanical and most conventional line serving for everything, the drawing will keep him in his place, and the cut may look to the careless observer like fine work. In truth the public cares for little more. The broad effect satisfies; and whoso knows nothing of what art is cannot feel its want. Here is our difficulty. So long as the public admire — and admiring buy — why should the publisher or the engraver care to improve? Fortunately the spur of competition touches the flanks of the most satisfied.

Would you, dear and attentive reader! care to educate yourself so as to know a good engraving from a poor one, follow these simple rules! Do not be beguiled by the first look and appearance of the cut before you! Your premature satisfaction may be partly owing to the pleasantness of the subject, and else to the cunning of the draughtsman, who knew how to make a good and effective drawing which not even the engraver could destroy. That nice engraving may be very badly engraved.

Examine it! Do you find any marks of intelligence in it? If a landscape, does the engraver appear to have had any notion of the growth of a tree, the formation of a mountain, the roundness and lightness of a cloud, etc.? Or is it all one flat unvarying set of monotonous unmeaning lines, so that the treatment of one part would do just as well for any other part? In the first case you have an artist's work; in the second a mechanic's. If the engraving is a figure-subject, a portrait, a statue, you will not be taken in by a pleasant and never so pretty arrangement of lights and shadows (that again is due to the draughtsman); but your eyes will inquire if the engraver seemed to understand the drawing of the figure, if he seemed to know anything of form, and how to express the same with line as well as light and shade. Such things mark the artist. If you can find no trace of this knowledge, if you find hands and feet, etc., badly drawn, perspective not attended to nor distances kept, texture of materials everywhere alike, the lines in unpleasant opposition: that is only mechanic's work. These rules will not make you a judge of engraving. Time and study are needed. But the thought so bred in you will help you toward judgment; and if sometimes you have the fortune to meet with works of approved worth which you can compare with what you think good, the sight of what the best is will be new

teaching; and you will learn in time. The one clue to guide you out of the labyrinth of erroneous judgments is the constant recollection of the meaning of *expressiveness*. As before said, expressive work is artistic, inexpressive is mechanical. My teaching can go no further.

And need I say again, even when you distrust yourself, place no faith in anonymous Reviewers! Distrust of the Anonymous might be useful in other matters beside Engraving on Wood.

PHOTOGRAPHY ON WOOD

A CONSIDERABLE amount of ignorance is afloat concerning the use of photography on wood, as used instead of drawing. Its advantages, or disadvantages, are so little known that it may be worth while to give it some attention.

Says that luminous art-meteor, the *Sun*: — "To photography on wood we owe the improved character of our wood-engraving more than to any other cause." And all we gain from it is set forth at length, as follows: —

"Of course this method (of photography) admits of the reduction of a drawing to a block of any desired size. Another advantage is that it enables the engraver to have the original drawing always in front of him to refer to, and that he is not at any time exposed to the danger of going wrong in his effects, by reason of not having something to refer to for the general effect that

it was contemplated to attain. It also does away with the possibility of the design being lost by an accident to the surface of the block while the engraver is at work at it, and it has the very salutary effect of making the engraver responsible to the artist for the effect he attains. Before photography upon wood was adopted an engraver could say, when confronted with defects in his block, 'Well, what can I do? Your artist drew it so.' Even now, art-editors who give out drawings upon the wood take the precaution to make ferrotypes or negatives of them, so as to hold the engraver to account if his work be unfaithful. It used to be that artists would go wild over the engravings that were shown them as representing what they had put on the wood with such care. The imperturbable engraver could always turn upon them with placid irresponsibility and tell them their drawing was at fault."

Further: — "As an engraver goes over the surface of his block, he destroys the drawing by transforming it into lines, which are actually meaningless and invisible until he blackens them with his lead pencil or ink-dabber. He has to depend too much on his memory, and he invariably loses, and incurs the danger of substituting his own ideas for those of the artist. With the design photographed upon the wood, he has constantly before him the artist's work, and is really elevated, in a measure, to

the position of an interpreter of it, or translator of it into a new medium. It is in this sort of inspiration of the engraver that the chief provocation to excellent work lies, because it conceals the mechanical aspect of his function as much as possible, and brings him into a more intimate and sympathetic relation with the artist," etc.

And in *Scribner* we find it written: — "From the moment that *Scribner* began to avail itself of the art of photographing pictures upon the wood a great development took place."

From which we are to be led to infer that the use of photography upon wood is almost if not quite an original enterprise of those hardy discoverers. The *Sun* writer seems implicitly to believe it. Far however is that from being the truth, for photographs on the wood instead of drawings, and photographs of drawings-on-wood for the sake of reference and comparison with the proof, have been in use for the last twenty years or more. I have before me at this writing photographs of Sir F. Leighton's illustrations to George Eliot's *Romola* in the early numbers of the *Cornhill Magazine*, — photographs taken from Leighton's own drawings on the wood: with which I doubt not he compared my engravings, although the blocks were never declined. I have similar photographs of the drawings of Noel Paton,

Rossetti, and others, sent to me in those days, by men who chose my work, to prevent me from cutting "the whole soul out of them." Photographs *upon the wood* were in use also, but were always declined by me, as I should decline them now. They do not suit my "mechanical function." Only in one instance, retaining the photograph on the wood — a reduction of a drawing by Doré, I copied the original drawing myself in preference to cutting the photograph; and my work was approved by the painter and not declined by the publisher.

Says the *Sun:* — "This method admits of the reduction of a drawing to a block of any desired size." Is this would-be critic so utterly ignorant of the subject on which he pretends to give instruction as not to know that the poorest draughtsman is capable of correctly reducing a drawing to any desired size, without the aid of photography? Yet he assumes here to be showing the advantage of photography.

Says the *Scribner* instructor, reinforcing his *confrère*: "Drawing upon the limited surface of a block has always been regarded by artists as a cramped business; the *freëst handling is not attainable that way.*" Is it so indeed? Was Holbein cramped when he drew the Day of Judgment on a block three inches by two? Was Bewick cramped when he drew pictures worthy of Hogarth, on his few inches of wood? Or was Clennell

cramped, or Thurston, or William Harvey, or Thomas Landseer? Was the freëst handling not attainable that way by George Cruikshank, and Seymour (the precursor of *Punch*), and Leech, and the Doyles, and Tenniel, and Thomas, and Walker, and Gilbert? Did the greater painters find free handling unattainable: Maclise, and Mulready, and Millais, and Noel Paton, and Leighton, and Pickersgill? All these — I cannot at a moment name all who drew directly upon the block — found no difficulty in freëst handling; and all these *in line*. And in landscape — washed drawings, I can recall a few: W. L. Leitch, Duncan, Dodgson, nearly all the water-color men. In France need I cite more than Jacque (known somewhat as an etcher, and tolerably free-handed), and Meissonier, and Grandville, and Tony Johannot, and Gavarni, and Doré? Most of these names are very likely not known to *Scribner;* but one sitting in the editorial chair, if only *pro hâc vice*, should have learned his alphabet before giving lectures upon grammar. Surely though, he must have thought of some American names while announcing that impossibility of free handling "upon the limited surface of a block." Need I remind him of Darley, and Eytinge, and Mrs. Foote, and Coleman, and Hennessy, and Homer, and Appleton Brown, and Waud, and Woodward, and Moran? I do not exhaust the catalogue, naming only the first that come into

my mind. Must I name any more to disprove so much of the assertion in *Scribner* — that *the freëst handling is not attainable on the limited surface of a block?*

Says the *Sun:* — "Another advantage (of *the photograph on the wood*) is that it enables the engraver to have the original drawing in front of him to refer to." Supposing this to happen occasionally, one may yet ask — What is the advantage? If the drawing on the wood (say the copy of a picture) is by the hand of a draughtsman, what is to prevent the same advantage of having the original to refer to? Ah! says the 'cute Reviewer — "but the original itself might be on the wood." Then the engraver could have a photograph of it always "in front of him to refer to." The *Scribner* folks themselves could have told their Reviewer that. It is not many weeks since they sent me photographs of two drawings, the originals being on the wood. And truly, as I supposed them sent for me to refer to, I had to decide whether I should engrave the drawings as drawn, or alter them to the likeness of the photographs — which did not exactly render the drawings.

Then, following the course of the *Sun*, — having the photograph "does away with the possibility of the design being lost by an accident to the surface of the block while the engraver is at work at it." He is hard put to it for his "advantages." I have engraved and have known

engravers during fifty years, and I do not recollect such an accident occurring. But it is well to provide for possibilities.

And then, continues he: — "As an engraver goes over the surface of his block, he destroys the drawing by transforming it into lines, which are actually meaningless and invisible until he blackens them with his lead pencil or ink dabber." What wicked engraver's lad has been laughing on this occasion? As the *Nation* particularly observes, "it is not given to every man to be a critic." That was meant for me, not for his brother in the *Sun*. But though not "a critic," I may, having been brought up as an engraver, be qualified to speak *of the processes* of engraving; and I have to contradict this writer upon every point in the sentence I have just quoted. The engraver does not destroy the drawing by transforming it into lines (though were it a fac-simile drawing it would be of no consequence if he did). A *washed drawing*, in which alone he has to care for effect, is as well seen on the engraved block, and on every part of the block as he goes on with his "transforming," as it was before he touched it. You cannot indeed destroy the effect if you would. Why lines should necessarily be meaningless I do not understand; but meaningless or not, they are not invisible. And no one but a bungling apprentice would think of blackening his block with

lead pencil at any time, or with the "ink dabber" till the whole was finished. Certainly he has had his lesson from the errand-boy, who has led him astray. He goes as wild as his friends were in the habit of going before the invention of photography held the placid and imperturbable engraver to account — "in the days of the wild artist boys, a long time ago."

But now — happily escaping "the danger of substituting his own ideas," "with the design photographed upon the wood, he has constantly before him the artist's work, and is really elevated, in a measure, to the position of an interpreter, or translator of it into a new medium. It is in this sort of inspiration of the engraver that the chief provocation to excellent work lies, because it conceals the mechanical aspect of his function as much as possible, and brings him into a more intimate and sympathetic relation with the artist." Prodigious! He is inspired by escaping the danger of ideas, loses the aspect of his function, and so is provoked into excellence and becomes intimate with the artist. This is being elevated in a measure to the position of an interpreter, or translator of it into a new medium. It is better than the working backwards to simplicity of our friend in the *Nation*. And too funny to be treated seriously.

The real history of photography-on-wood is as follows.

My friend is too young to know anything about it, except from some other Reviewer's report, which I assure him is not to be depended on. I will tell him what I know. There were publishers in those days who found photography on wood cheaper than drawing: also I will not deny that some of them may have had strange maggots in their heads, foolish notions of securing new effects, etc. There were also then as now artists, men of name, whose works (or names) were wanted; but of these men some could not draw upon the wood. Stanfield, for one, could not. And there were others who, not drawing easily or well, disliked "the trouble," yet were not content with copies by the usual draughtsmen. So photography was tried and, such reasons weighing more than its own worth, little by little made its way. Cheapness goes far. When the London *Graphic* was started (was it before *Scribner's Magazine?*) this photographing of artists' drawings came into more general use. Some men who could draw saw the chance for double pay, a price for the photographed copy from their drawing and a price for the original sold elsewhere. The publisher saved something; so both were satisfied. Draughtsmen were thrown over and engravers were sacrificed. That was their business. I never heard of either draughtsman or engraver preferring a photograph. Here is the whole story. And if we were to say that painters

cannot draw, nor draughtsmen copy, that would not be much praise for the photographer.

So far from the photograph being a help to the engraver, it was at first a decided hindrance. The block turned black with the nitrate of silver; and the engraver *did destroy the photograph* and render invisible his lines upon the photograph even as he cut them. That was indeed working in the dark. That special difficulty has been got over; but worse remains behind.

When Cruikshank or Darley drew upon the wood — say in fac-simile, with pencil or pen-and-ink, their lines had some relation to the size of the block and the subject thereon drawn. When the artist whose great hand is cramped by so small a space, dashes in his cartoon with charcoal or crayon, to be reduced for the engraver, all that thoughtfully proportionate relation of the drawing to its purpose is lost sight of. See the so treated St. Gaudens' "Faith" in *Scribner* (June, p. 173). It is no longer a pen-and-ink drawing, but an overcrowded, foolishly minute, muddy etching. When Mary Hallock Foote makes a drawing directly on the block, whether of figures or landscape, the feeling of the drawing, dear impressionists! is better than any figure or landscape reduction we could have from her enlarged work. There is an art in drawing on wood (like that of criticism, not given to every one), a special beauty in that which no

photograph can convey or furnish. We shall not be gainers when drawing on the wood is a lost art, and photography universally substituted in its place: which seems to be the aim of *Scribner*.

But then "the truth of photography," "its absolute correctness," especially in copies of pictures. In the first place, it is *never* correct. It alters and destroys, and misrepresents. In the next place, it gives, whether of picture or portrait or out-door scene, *details which cannot be engraved*. This in the lighter parts of the subject, which so lose breadth, unless the engraver takes the liberty of throwing out what he considers unnecessary or injurious to his effect (in which case what is the special value of the photograph?) while in the darker parts, even in the clearest of photographs, *the details are lost*. With or without the photograph, unless the engraver is *not* to be interpreter and translator into the new medium, it is his business to use his judgment, and neither to servilely obey the painter who cannot draw or is ignorant of how to render color in black and white (some painters are), nor to servilely copy the photograph —which never is a faithful copy of a picture. The photograph does not give security to the painter; and it does degrade and deteriorate the engraver, who, whether idealist, or realist, or impressionist, should at least make use of thought, of judgment and taste. If he does not, or cannot, he is not an artist.

The very instance given by *Scribner* (July) of the value of photography, given to convict Mr. Linton of ignorance, proves my position. "Cole's engraving of Modjeska, which he praises" — writes the smart Reviewer — "was done from *a photograph on the block*, and could not have been so well done in any other way." To which *dictum* of the amateur critic the engraver replies — From a drawing it would have been better cut and might have escaped the faults it now has.

There are some things, of the mechanical sort, in which photography is of use. But except as material for reference, and to save time in mere hand-work, the less the artist has to do with it the better. I speak as an artist — as draughtsman and engraver: not as an Art-Reviewer.

6

FURTHER HINTS

GOOD READER! having got so far in your learning, the rest must depend upon yourself. To know what is good and what bad, and why it is so, like the faculty for expressing the same intelligibly (which is the art of the critic), is not indeed given to every one. But with patience and diligent inquiry, though you may not become a qualified Reviewer, you may yet obtain such knowledge as will not only prevent you from being imposed upon by Reviewers, but give you an interest and pleasure in engravings such as only the student can obtain.

It may help some little toward this if I string together yet a few hints, in addition to those I have already offered: and even some of them it may not harm to emphasize by repetition.

And first, do not be sure because an engraving pleases you that it must be a good engraving. A taking sub-

ject, well drawn, may have been beyond the engraver's power to spoil. Look into it, and try to find how much of art is in the cutting!

Recollect, on the other hand, that a much inferior subject, of little interest in itself, and even not remarkable for the pleasantness or excellence of the drawing, may be very well engraved.

If you want to judge of *engraving*, you must separate in your mind the engraving from the drawing.

Still less will you allow yourself to be taken in by the prettiness of the draughtsman's arrangements. Give *him* all the credit for *that!* It is his due. But do not suppose because of that the engraving — the engraver's part — is either better or worse. My hints are concerning engraving: though the draughtsman must be brought in sometimes.

Do not think that every engraving must have both force and delicacy, or that force is better than delicacy, or delicacy better than force. That depends upon the subject. When you find one, or both, in an engraving, try to see also the means by which they have been obtained. Not that you may judge of the "legitimacy" of the work (the end will justify the means): but that you may learn whether the end has been reached designedly or by accident. Accidental results are not meritorious, and may generally be doubted.

Do not be carried away captive by the fineness or the boldness of an engraving! Either quality is good in the right place. Excessive fineness — very minute work — is not necessary to constitute a *fine* engraving: using the word italicized in an artistic sense, as great or good. The super-fineness, or the multiplicity of lines, indicates no advance in art. The artist will not employ two lines when one will serve his purpose as well, — or better. Nor will he for any consideration consent to unmeaning lines.

On this question of fineness I may be allowed to quote from my *Atlantic* article. Though I yet may be misunderstood, I cannot write anything more to the purpose.

"It is altogether a mistake to suppose that a work cannot be too fine, or that fineness (closeness and littleness of line) and refinement (finish) are anything like synonymous terms. There is such a thing as propriety — suitability not only to size but to subject — in the treatment of an engraving. (Fineness may be out of character with the subject.) A work may be bold even to the verge of coarseness, yet quite fine enough for its purpose. . . . Also it may be finished and refined, however bold: in which case to call it coarse simply because the lines may be large and wide apart would be only misuse of words. . . . Fineness as an artist's word is not the same word as in the proverb — 'Fine feathers make fine birds.'

Fine (minute) lines will not make a fine (artistic) engraving. . . . An engraving is fine, that is *good*, so far as art, as distinguished from mechanism, has been employed upon it, is visible in the result: visible, I would say further, even to the uneducated, if not already vitiated by the words of misleading critics. The *art of an engraving* is discoverable, even by the uninitiated, in the *intention of the lines*. You may not have an artist's quickness of perception, nor his maturer judgment; but if you see an engraving in which the parts, any of them taken separately, are unintelligible, you will rightly suppose that the engraver did not know what he was doing, or how to do it. . . . Do not believe that such work is good for anything, though you read the most impartial and unbought recommendations of many a newspaper. Art is a designing power. If you can find no proof of that, reject the work as bad.

"Every line of an engraving ought to have a meaning, should be cut in the block *with design*. From a drawing you can erase a false line; from a metal plate you can hammer out your faults: in wood there is no such easy alteration. On paper or canvas you can rub in a meaningless background, a formless void, which is all you want; on steel or copper you can cross lines repeatedly so minutely that all which can be seen is as vague as any rubbing-in: you cannot do this in wood.

To cut so finely as to get only color is next to impossible, and so far as it can be done useless, for it will not print. It is for this reason — that every line in wood-engraving bears witness for or against you, that I have spoken of white line as the true province of engraving-on-wood."

The engraver — further repeating myself — "is an artist only *so far as every line he cuts has intention of representing something*. In such work he is an artist in exactly the same degree in which the translator of poetry is a poet." [We do not hear of the unaccountable dislike of poets to free translation.] "No literal translation is artistic. The translator must be possessed by the spirit of his original before he can speak in his own language what had been said in the other tongue. Between literality, never correct" — mechanical exactness (miscalled realism) in engraving — "and translation, which do you prefer?

". . . A copper (or steel) engraving which the engraver absolutely draws with his own lines — no drawing at all on the plate except his own — has the dignity of a poetic translation. A wood-engraving from a washed drawing has the same merit, is a translation of as much if not greater difficulty, since (as before shown) every line is unalterable. Copper (or steel) has its preëminences — fineness and delicacy" (which it is foolish waste of time

to endeavor to rival). "There are brilliant and atmospheric effects" (unknown to the *Scribner* school), "above all a freshness and painter-like touch peculiar to wood, which on copper cannot be produced. Especially the character of the painter (not as shown in brush-marks) can be rendered in a way not approachable by copper. These are indications of *art* in engraving, the results at which an artist-engraver would aim, *and by which alone*, according to the degree of his success, *he must take rank among artists*."

Out of this the *Nation* critic has somehow evolved a theory, of which he gives me the credit, that "an untouched block is the only medium for the artist-engraver, and no one *but him* ought to touch it, whether with pencil or brush in preliminary laying out of the work." All which is the height of absurdity, albeit it is possible to engrave without a drawing, on a plain block as on a steel plate. And "the most ambitious engravers we have" — the *Sun* says — "do their work as nearly as possible in the same way." Were this last statement true it might of itself dispose of the arguments in favor of photography — no longer needed on the wood. However, the information from the *Sun*, like the theory of the *Nation*, is erroneous.

Photography is better than no drawing at all. It is better than an incorrect drawing. That is the best you

can say of photography: though the assertion in *Scribner* of the incompetence of American draughtsmen were really true.

Do not be too exacting as regards distinction of *material* in an engraving of a few inches square; but if you cannot distinguish water from grass, sky from stone walls, calico from bronze, or a hair-mat from a philosopher's cheek, you may be right in doubting the engraver's perception of differences; the perception of the admiring Reviewer also. You have no occasion to inquire further as to whether the Reviewer was paid by the newspaper or by the "house."

It is quite certain that all the approving notices of magazines and other artistic work are not written by direct order of the publishers.

Also, you should not take for granted that objections to a certain style of work must necessarily be the petulant expressions of exasperated or disappointed engravers; and you may further admit that a critic, even if he has had experience in engraving, may not be altogether mistaking in his censures, though he cannot make his reasons clear to Reviewers who have had no experience, who know nothing of the subject in dispute, and whose acquaintance with the art of which that subject is part may be *nil*.

On one ground however you may make common cause

with such Reviewers, and abstain from further information: in the words of the poet —

"Where ignorance is bliss"
(even when not paid for standing in the *Sun*)
"'Tis folly to be wise."

Some last words of personal apology may not be out of place. Have I dealt too harshly or too hardly with my Reviewers? Not more hardly, I will maintain, than the unqualified ignorance in relation to engraving betrayed by some and the unhesitating mendacity of others as regards myself have earned, — and required, were it only that the readers of the anonymous might be on their guard. Personal resentment — I have none. I suppose these men must write to live, though I may not be sufficiently impressed with the necessity of such living.

Of those artists and engravers whose works I have "assailed with violence" or "passed with contemptuous silence" (for it seems I am not permitted to be right either way) I ask a brotherly pardon. I have not sought to wound the tenderest susceptibility. If I have "picked holes," it has been only in order to sow some seeds of truth; if I have hit any awkwardly, it has been in the perhaps too great eagerness of an innocent desire to en-

force sound principles. There is really no venom in my rattle, no spite in my most indignant and splenetic vituperation. Only with "conscience and tender heart" (that is not borrowed from my Reviewers) I have said what to me seemed — and seems — important to the interest of Art, — which also is the higher interest of artists. Toward Mr. Cole or Mr. Evans, Mr. Eaton or Mr. Kelly, or any of the unnamed whose works I have canvassed with an artist's freedom, I can say with all sincerity I have no ill-feeling. Nevertheless I had a right to criticize what challenged criticism. I would speak as frankly and as harshly of the works of my dearest friends. Could my Reviewers, with their hands upon their hollownesses, say as much, I would forgive their ugliest blows and all their offensiveness, even as I hope to be forgiven for my own.

To Messrs. Scribner, much as their name has been called in question, I do not feel that apology is needed, certainly not beyond what I have elsewhere been glad to say. They should be glad of any plain speaking. I do not imagine that my worst words will injure them, or my best be of any very beneficial consequence. If they can learn anything from what I have written and so improve their already very creditable and (notwithstanding all mistakes) deservedly popular magazine, so much the better for their subscribers. I do not reckon on a considerable

number of copies to be sold through me. Did I attach such influence to my writing I should claim the publishers' gratitude instead of an editor's ill-temper.

It yet may be that a few new subscribers will be attracted for the sake of proving the value of my Hints. To these and what other public may honor me with so much attention, I offer beforehand the expression of a hope that they may profit by my instruction. And now, O weary Reader! farewell! My task — not altogether pleasant — is finished; and I have but to sit down and patiently await the scalping-knives of the Pursuers.

POSTSCRIPT.

SINCE my work was at press I have had a visit from Mr. Cole. Without revolver! Nor did hard or unfriendly words pass between us. I think he was satisfied with the welcome he received; and for myself, I was pleased to become acquainted with him, and also with some proofs of his later work which he brought for my acceptance. He did not hold that I had abused him "like an artistic pickpocket"; "was not offended" at my strictures in the *Atlantic;* and critic and criticized agreed in their judgments to an extent that might have astonished a listening Reviewer.

What I have written of him, being honest, may yet stand. I do not recall my words; but I am glad to know that there is no fear of *his* misunderstanding.

W. J. L.

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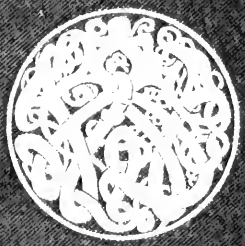
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